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No. 5 Hamilton Place, Boston, Massachusetts

The American Idea

A Sketch in One Act

By

LILY CARTHEW, pseud of

Lillian P. Heydemann.

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BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO.
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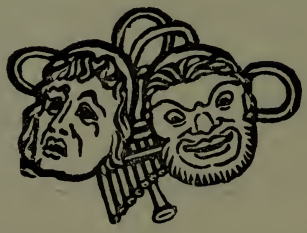
The American Idea

CHARACTERS

(*As produced at the Peabody Playhouse, May 7, 1918.*)

ABE GOLDMAN, *an old-fashioned Orthodox Jew* - *Henry Chanin*
ESTHER GOLDMAN, *his wife* - - - - *Bessie Edelstein*
MIGNON GOLDMAN, *his daughter, seventeen years old* - - - - - - - *Ruth Holzmun*
SOLLY ROSENBAUM, *a would-be suitor for Mignon* - *Charles Gilman*
JOHN KELLY, *whom she marries* - - - *Norman Bernard*

SCENE.—The parlor of the Goldman house.
TIME.—Evening. The present day.



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AUG 30 1918

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The American Idea

SCENE.—*The parlor of the Goldman home. Entrances* R. *and* C. *back. Hat tree at* L. *of* C. D. *Piano across upper* R. *corner; table and two chairs down* L. C.; *sewing table down* R.; *desk down* L. *Two brass candlesticks and picture in ornate frame on piano; samovar and a few books on table* L. C.; *sewing basket on table down* R.

(*As curtain rises* MIGNON *is playing latest popular song and singing it. Her father,* ABE, *is seated at table* L. C. *reading a Jewish newspaper.*)

ABE. Mignon, Mignon, stop pleass dat nonsinse. Vat is et—a girl from your age playing sech a bum music.

MIGNON. Why, father dear—this isn't bum. It's awfully popular.

ABE. Popular! Who wrote et? (*Imitating her by singing first line of song with exaggeration.*) Oi vy—et's a song fit for hoodlums. Who wrote et?

MIGNON (*looking at music*). Irving Berlin. (*Or name of proper author.*)

ABE. Vy shouldn't you rader play someting by Mendelssohn oder Rubenstein?

MIGNON (*comes* D. C.). Why, father, because—you see no one plays that stuff nowadays. The American idea is something bright and lively all the time.

ABE. De American idea! Is dat so? De American idea! Vell—vit *me* und de American idea *togedder*—it isn't. Understand dat. (*Goes* D. L.) Every time I look at *you,* I tink of vat de American idea done to your name vat used to be *Rachel.* Now et's Mignon—*Mignon. Mignon Goldman*—ef you know de vay dat sounds to *me.* Supposing—supposing my name was Alger*oon* oder Reginald.—Oi! (*Making face of disgust.*) Oi!

MIGNON. But, father—Mignon is such a cute name. I hated to be called Rachel. Everybody made fun of it.

ABE. Oh—et's a cute name. Cute—cute. You've already heard et a word cute. Remember, my daughter, dat vater und oil don't mix. Rachel Goldman sounds much better as *Mignon* Goldman. (MIGNON *crosses* D. R., *gets knitting from sewing table, sits and knits.*) De American idea is all right fer some people, but fer me—et's nothing doing. Verstehst? (D. R.)

MIGNON. It's too *bad* that you're not more advanced. If you were you wouldn't see things that way.

ABE (*much insulted*). Say, missy. Don't tell me from advancements. Et's about time dat you advanced into matrimony—and don't you forget it.

MIGNON (*aside*). I know it. Perhaps I will.

ABE (*showing delight*). Vat did you said—perhaps you vill? (*Teasingly.*) Ha-ha. I'm on. Jakey Rosenbaum's a son—hey?

MIGNON (*not looking at him*). No, father.

ABE. Et looks suspicious. He already called at the houze vonce—and telephoned twice. (*Pause.*) I also hear he took out a report on my bizness.

MIGNON (*shrinking at his lack of delicacy*). Father! Please don't talk that way. He's not—not my type of man. When I marry, I'll marry for love and nothing else.

ABE. Love—shmove. (*Crosses* C.) Don't talk yourself in tings. De man vat is suitable—de man vat your mudder and I picks out fer you, is de man vat you vill marry. (*Sits* R. *of table.*)

MIGNON. You talk as if you were in the old country. In America people think for themselves—and act for themselves. They marry whom they love on their own responsibility.

ABE. Yes. And take de trip to Reno on fader's responsibility.

MIGNON. You're too pessimistic.

(*Crosses* L. *of table and sits.*)

ABE. Vot am I?

MIGNON. I say you're too pessimistic.

ABE. Is dat a compliment oder an insult? (*Very autocratic.*) Remember I von't stand no monkey-doodles from no vones.

MIGNON. Why, it means that you are always looking for trouble.

ABE. I'm looking fer troubles? Dat's all right! I'm contentments. All de great philosifers vas alvays looking fer troubles. Childrens should obey de parents.—Take examples from me and your mudder. Ve didn't even know each oder before ve vas married. Our parents arranged de whole ting. Ain't ve happy?

MIGNON. Some people are easily satisfied.

ABE. Vot?

MIGNON (*goes to her father and kneels at* R. *of him*). I mean—that wouldn't you and mother have been pleased if you had had a romance before you were married? If you had picked each other out from all the people on earth?

ABE. Ve vouldn't have picked each other. (MIGNON *looks surprised.*) Of course not. Ven a man is young, mit foolish, he tinks only from beauty. (*He speaks sincerely and appreciatively.*) Your mudder is by no means a beauty! But I don't say dat against her. She is good and economicals and a fine cook and lots of oder tings. She is de best vomin living. But ven I was young, I vouldn't have had sense to see dat. Ef all de parents vould be de matchmakers—all de college bums vouldn't be marrying chorus gerls.—I tell you ——

MIGNON (*impatiently*). Father!

(*Rises and crosses* D. R.)

ABE (*imitating her*). Don't say fader like dat—fader. Dat's all right. I know vat I'm talking. (*He rises and crosses* D. C.) And me? I ain't et no six feet schmutt ball hero—nor no Jesse Willard. I ain't got a face or shape vot artists should rave over—but ain't I a good pervider—ain't I?

(*During this speech he grows more and more angry, showing much temper.*)

MIGNON. Yes.

ABE. And did I ever come home drunk—did I?

MIGNON. No.

ABE. Parents ain't sech fools as de childrens tinks.

MIGNON (*very spiritedly*). Yes. And children aren't such fools as parents think.

ABE. Here.—Vit me—don't try to be smart. I don't like et a—smart vomin mit sassy answers—a suffragetsky. Be a nize girl—dat's all.

MIGNON. Can't I express an opinion?

ABE (*shouting*). No—don't you hear me—no.

(*He bangs on the table.*)

ESTHER (*off stage*). Abe—Abe!

ABE. Vell, Esther? (*He crosses* L.)

ESTHER (*still off stage*). Vat are you yelling you should vake up de neighbors? (*Enters and goes* D. C.) Ain't you got a polite voice as you can talk like a gentleman? I never heard sech loud talking. Exactly like you are in Russia. Can't you ——

ABE. Mrs. Goldman—don't tink you can order me around!

MIGNON. Well—it's almost seven-thirty. I've got to be going. (*Getting hat and coat from hat-stand* U. L.)

ESTHER. Vere are you going, dear? (*Crosses* R.)

MIGNON (*comes* D. C., *putting on wraps*). Over to Mary Clark's house.

ABE. Vat synagogue does her fader belong?

MIGNON. She doesn't belong to any church, father.

ABE. Oi. Like Robert Ingersol—a mench.

ESTHER. She's a very nice girl, Abe.

ABE. I'm not saying she isn't. (*To* MIGNON.) Vat's going on—a party?

MIGNON. N-no,—not exactly. We're just going to have a—a—social evening. Mary Clark—and Isaac Rosansky and John Kelly—and Gretchen Sneider.

ABE. Ain't Lee Hung Chang going to be dere?

MIGNON (*reprovingly*). Father! Well, I've got to be hurrying along. One of the boys is waiting for me. (*Kissing father.*) Good-night.

ABE. Good-bye. Be home early.

MIGNON (*kissing mother*). Good-bye.

ABE. Vere is your set of furs?

MIGNON. I haven't any.

ABE. Mrs. Goldman—at vonce—buy her a set of furs. How is et—a daughter von mine shouldn't have a set of furs?

ESTHER. I saw a grand set fer her last week—von day—in Hutton's. So beautiful. Minx.

ABE. Buy et—buy et. How much is et?

ESTHER. Sixty dollars.

ABE. Oi! I'll buy her de same ting in Silverman's Fur Store fer $4.98.

ESTHER. But, Abe—et ain't de same kind.

ABE. Never mind—I don't believe in extravagance.

MIGNON. Oh, I don't need any furs. Thank you just the same. I'm going now—good-bye.

(*She exits* C. *door.* ABE *follows her to door;* ESTHER *crosses to* C. *and sits* R. *of table, darning stocking.*)

ABE (*calling after* MIGNON). Got a handkerchief?

MIGNON (*off stage*). Yes.

ABE (*calling to her*). Don't lose et. (*He goes* D. R. *and sits; to* ESTHER.) I tell you, Esther, I don't like et de vay tings is vit Mignon. She should be already married.

ESTHER. De girl is not kvite eighteen.

ABE. Jest de right age to be settling down.

(*Starts to read paper again,* L.)

ESTHER. Not in America, Abe. The American idea is —— (ESTHER *darns.*)

ABE. Sha vit de American idea. Et's rotten. Samuel Cohen's a daughter has de American idea. She vants a career before she is married. And I understand she had a couple of good offers. But no—she vants a career (*sarcastically*)—fine.

ESTHER. Noo? Give her a career.

ABE. She gradiated college—and she learnt so much Greek mit Latin and sociagolagetics and oder damn nonsinse dat she don't know vat she is talking. And now vat is she—a school-teacher. Great. Vell, she vill be a hard-vorking old maid fer de rest of her days.

ESTHER. Every one doesn't have to be a school-teacher.

ABE. Sure not. But von prefessions is as bad as anoder. De only decent respectable prefession fer a vomin—is getting married.

ESTHER. Vell—dat's not de American idea. (*Bell rings.*) Oi, company. I'll answer de door. Abe, dear—straighten tings up. Mach nice. [*She exits.*

ABE (*picking up newspaper and straightening up the table*). I vonder is et some of my relations coming to borrowing money. I vish et vas no sech tings as relations. Et makes me sick to look at dem. A bunch of low lifes and suckers. Vell, I've got to put on a pleasant face. (*Forcing a smile and going to door. His expression changes to one of genuine delight.*) Oh—oh, Mr. Rosenbaum, I'm glad to see you. (*Enter* SOLLY ROSENBAUM. *He is a loud appearing man of thirty.* ABE *and* SOLLY *shake hands.*) How are you—how are you?

ESTHER (*hanging* SOLLY'S *hat and coat*). Vy are you asking? Don't he looks simply grand? (*She goes* D. L.)

SOLLY. Tank you, Mrs. Goldman.

ABE. You look de image of your fader.

SOLLY. Do I? He's cross-eyed, you know.

ABE. I meant your mudder. Ain't I foolish—I meant your mudder. She's a very handsome vomin.

SOLLY. Dey all say as I resemble mummer. Vere is Miss Goldman?

ABE. Sit down, Mr. Rosenbaum. (*He crosses* L. *and sits* L. *of table;* SOLLY *sits* R. *of table;* ESTHER *crosses* R. *and sits* D. R.) I'm sorry as my Mignon isn't here. She vill be so disappointments ven she hears you have been here. I heard her say—only yesterday, " Mr. Rosenbaum is de nicest man I know. He is so pleasant and he has sech a lot of money." Esther, bring in de fruit, dear. Mr. Rosenbaum likes et fruit—hey?

SOLLY. I don't mind ef I do.

ESTHER. Yes. And have a glass of tea. [*She exits* R.

SOLLY. Vere is Miss Goldman, did you say?

ABE. She—she vent to cooking school.

SOLLY (*pleased*). Oh—cooking school. Dat's a very nice vay as a young lady should spend her evenings. You've got et a very nice daughter, Mr. Goldman. I like her.

ABE (*very patronizing and acting dissatisfied*). Yes—she's a fine gerl. De only ting ve find fault vit her—for a young gerl, she's too sensibles. Alvays cooking someting oder sewing someting. A regular home gerl. Und she never spends et a cent of money—never. Und ve vish she vould. Ve vant she should enjoy herself a few years yet—but de vay de fellows is chasing after her—I don't know vat vill be. Goldstein's a son—de pawnbroker is crazy for her.

SOLLY (*depreciatingly*). Fe!

ABE. Aaron Bloom's a son—also a pawnbroker—vould give anyting fer her.

SOLLY. Vy, Mr. Goldman. (*Rises and crosses* D. R.) You don't vant et your daughter should marry a pawnbroker. Vy, I'm surprised. Dat ain't de American idea.

ABE. Again dat American idea. (*He rises and crosses* C.) Vell—vat do you tink vould be a good bizness?

SOLLY (*very importantly*). Ladies' Silk Undervear. Et's a great bizness, Mr. Goldman. I ought to know.

ABE. Is dat so? Et's a good bizness. Von ting—you ain't had any failures as yet.

Enter MRS. GOLDMAN *with glasses of tea for* SOLLY *and* ABE *on tray. In her other hand she carries a plate of fruit and kihels.*[1] *She puts everything on the table.*

ESTHER. Here, help yourself, Mr. Rosenbaum. Have a banana oder an orange.

SOLLY (*taking orange and cutting it in quarters*). I'll have an orange, Mrs. Goldman, tank you. (*They both eat, making much noise,* ABE *sipping his tea very audibly*

[1] An egg cookie, much eaten by Russian Jews.

and SOLLY *grunting with satisfaction over his orange. Both tuck napkins in their collars.*) Dat's de oranges vat costs seventy-five cents a dozen—ain't et?

ESTHER. Yes, seventy-five cents. (*Sighs.*)

ABE (*sighs*). De cost of living is someting fierce nowadays. I remember de time ven you could almost buy et a houze for vat you pays for an orange now.

SOLLY. Yes. De cost of living is vat frightens us fellers from gitting married.

ABE. Vy foolish man, you, don't you know et costs et cheaper fer two to live den vone? Like de orange? Dey is Florida oranges—ve alvays has de best. (*Suddenly closes eye and covers it with his hand.*) Oi—oi—Esther—is orange juice good for de eyes? (*Rises.*)

ESTHER (*innocently*). I never heard et vas good.

ABE. Don't be ignorant, pleass—et's burning me.

SOLLY. I'm very sorry, Mr. Goldman.

ABE (*pacing up and down*). Dat's all right, Mr. Rosenbaum. De only ting I don't like et—a vomin from forty years of age should answer vit foolishness. (U. L.)

ESTHER (*crossing to* ABE, U. L.; SOLLY *crosses* D. R.). Oh—some of Mr. Rosenbaum's orange skvirted in your eye—oh!

ABE. Yes—et spitted right in. (*Walks up and down.*)

ESTHER. Have patience, Abe—in a minute et vill be better.

ABE (*stamps foot*). Don't say to me "have patience"—I'm vorrying as I shouldn't be blind.

SOLLY. I feel so awful ——

ESTHER. Vait, Mr. Rosenbaum, vait (*she goes* D. R.)—in a halb a second he von't remember anyting about et. I'm so sorry dat my Mignon isn't here. She vent to Mary Clark's a party.

(SOLLY *looks astonished.*)

ABE (*getting in back of* ESTHER *and pulling at her arm, he says aside*). Vat are you making me out a liar?

SOLLY. I tought she vas at cooking school?

ESTHER (*looks at* ABE, *sees her mistake and tries to rectify it*). Sure. I meant at cooking school—I alvays

get so mixed up ven I'm talking. You see my Mignon—doesn't like cooking oder sewing—and she never vants to stay a minute in de houze. Alvays flying around vonce to moving pitzkers—vonce to dancings—anoder time dis—anoder time dat. De American idea is—don't stay to home. So Abe an' me made et a plan—she should go to cooking school so as she should git some substantials to her.

ABE (*during* ESTHER'S *speech he has been walking up and down in misery over her breaks. Aside*). Ven a vomin talks she alvays puts her foots in et. Oi ——

SOLLY. Ain't she got substantials?

ESTHER. No —— (*Looking at* ABE.) Yes,—no—yes.

ABE. Substantials—vot are you talking—my daughter shouldn't have substantials. (*He crosses* R. *to* SOLLY; ESTHER *crosses* D. L.) Ridiculance. Don't listen by Mrs. Goldman. She likes to make my Mignon out a buttercup—I mean a butterfly.

SOLLY. Oh—I see.

(*He is gazing* R. *as if in deep thought.*)

ESTHER. Vy—a butterfly—vot's a butterfly?

ABE (*aside*). Esther—et's alvays a time ven yer don't hev to be Mrs. George Washington. (*To* SOLLY.) Et ain't only as she is substantials—but she is so accomplishments. Sech a player—sech a singer—really, vonderful—I don't remember ven I heard sech a singing.

SOLLY. Dat's so. Fond of music. I like voices vat brings tears to de eyes.

ABE (*shaking hands*). You'll love her voice—you'll love et. Esther—you remember de vild applausing de oder night—ven she sang by de stylish party?

ESTHER. Vat stylish party?

ABE (*looking at her*). You don't remember?

ESTHER (*catching on*). Oh—oh—you mean—by Rachel Klosky's—ven—ven—ven she gave a surprising party in Mignon's honor. *Dat* party.

ABE (*somewhat amused*). Ya—ya—you see—she remembers.

(*Bell rings.*)

ESTHER. Excuse me—I'll see vat et is. [*Exit* C.

ABE. Dat's perhaps my Mignon—she said she vould only be out a little vile. (*He crosses* D. L.)

(SOLLY *straightens up.*)

ESTHER (*excitedly, crossing* D. L.). Here's a telegram—who do you tink is dead?

ABE. I'll read it. (*Snatches telegram from her. Reads.*) "When you get this, I will be Mrs. John Kelly. We are coming home in a little while but I wanted to prepare you. Forgive me. Mignon." My daughter is Mrs. John Kelly!

SOLLY. Dat's vere I get left.

ESTHER. Oi—oi—my little Mignon is Mrs. John Kelly. (*She sinks into chair* R. *of table.*) Oi! Troubles—suress!

ABE. Most likely a bartender. Dat's bringing up children.

SOLLY (*a little sourly*). As good as a pawnbroker. [*He exits.*

ESTHER. Yes. Dat's bringing up children.

ABE (*looking sarcastically at* ESTHER). Cry, missus—cry. (*Crossing* C.) Et's all your bringing up.

ESTHER. My bringing up? Alvays ven et's bad et's my bringing up. Ven et's good et's de fader—ven et's bad et's de mudder.

ABE. De Talmud says de mudder is responsible for de children's character. In dis houze et's alvays de American Idea—de American Idea. Now look vat's happened from de American Idea.

ESTHER (*trying to reconcile herself*). Abe. Maybe ve ain't broad enough.

ABE. Already she talks not broad enough.

ESTHER. After all vat I vant is—my little Mignon should be happy.

ABE. And don't I vant dat? Don't I? Ain't she my child? Does a fader vant good for his children? Mrs. Hooligan is our neighbor down-stairs—ain't she?

ESTHER. Yes.

ABE. Don't I like de vomin? She's a nize vomin. Vat should I care ef she's Irish oder French oder anyting—as neighbors, as friends. But I've got an instinct against dis marrying. My heart says et ain't good. Et ain't natural and vat ain't natural don't bring happiness. (*Bell rings.*) I don't vant to see dem. I couldn't act sincereness. (*He crosses* D. R.)

ESTHER. Abe, our only daughter ——

(*She starts to go, hesitatingly at first, but finally courageous.*)

ABE. I don't vant to see dem. I vouldn't look at dem. John Kelly!

(*Bell rings again.*)

ESTHER (*calling to* ABE). Abe, I'm going to open de door.

ABE. Most likely a pug nose!

Enter ESTHER, *followed by* MIGNON *and then* JOHN, *who is a typical Jew.* ABE *is down right with his back turned to them.* ESTHER *goes* D. L.

MIGNON (*going to* ABE). Father—won't you please meet my husband? (*Goes to him, followed by* JOHN; ABE *stands obstinately refusing to turn.*) Oh, I suppose you think I'm dreadful—but, father, you see you haven't any romance in you. I wanted to marry the man *I* picked out—not for money or anything—but just because we cared. (*She puts her hand lovingly in* JOHN'S.) We do care—don't we, dear?

JOHN. Yes, Mr. Goldman. I love your daughter with all mine heart. (*With slight Jewish accent.*)

(ABE *hears with surprise—then turns to* JOHN. JOHN *crosses* MIGNON, *who goes* D. R. *He recognizes him as a Jew and holds out his hand.*)

ABE. Your name is John Kelly?

JOHN. Yes, Mr. Goldman.

ABE. And vat vas et formally?

JOHN. Yankele Operchinsky.

ABE (*repeats slowly*). Yan Kele Operchinsky? *Yan Kele!* (*A wise look comes on his face.*) I see—John Kelly.

MIGNON. Yes, father, that's the American idea.

CURTAIN

THE THIRTEENTH STAR

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Nine females. Scenery, two interiors; costumes, modern. Plays an hour and a half. The outbreak of the war takes away the entire staff of the Mapleford Bugle, so Caroline Mason undertakes to get out the paper. She takes over with it a fight against her fiancé, who is at the head of the local mills, quarrels with him, runs into a strike, but comes out of it all triumphant. A really strong play for girls, strongly recommended.

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CHARACTERS

CAROLINA RIDEOUT MASON
WILIFRED BAXTER, *her cousin* } *College Juniors.*
ELEANOR AMES
HELEN REDMOND
MRS. WINTHROP AMES, *Eleanor's mother.*
MARIE, *Eleanor's maid.*
AUNT LUCY, *colored mammy.*
MAGGIE O'FLYNN, *office girl of the Bugle.*
INEZ HUNTLEY, *a mill hand.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Room in the ancestral home of Carolina Rideout Mason, North Carolina. Spring, 1917.

ACT II.—Office of the Mapleford, Massachusetts, *Daily Bugle*, June 1.

ACT III.—Evening of the same day.

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A Comedy in One Act

By F. Roney Weir

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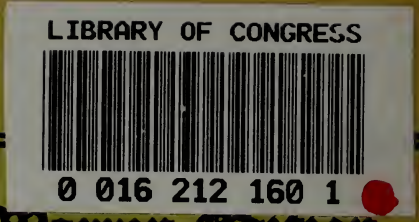
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